

REMARKS

The Office Action mailed May 5, 2004 has been carefully reviewed and, in view of the above amendments and following remarks, reconsideration and allowance of the application are respectfully requested.

I. Summary of Claims

Claims 1-35 are currently pending in the application, with claims 1, 17, and 31 being independent claims. No claims are added or cancelled, and each of independent claims 1, 17, and 31 are amended. Accordingly, claims 2-16, 18-30, and 32-35 remain in their original, as-filed condition.

All pending claims were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103 as being unpatentable over the combination of U.S. Patent Number 5,083,361 to Rudy, U.S. Patent Number 4,025,974 to Lea, et al., and U.S. Patent Number 5,993,585 to Goodwin, et al.

II. The Claims Patentably Distinguish Over The Applied Prior Art

Whereas Rudy does not disclose the manner of manufacturing the bladder, Goodwin discloses that a multiple step process may be utilized. More particularly, Goodwin discloses that (1) a first sheet is preformed with a thermoforming apparatus to form sidewalls and a lower surface of the bladder; (2) the first sheet is removed from the thermoforming apparatus and placed within a laminating apparatus; (3) a double-walled fabric core is placed within a concave area formed by the first sheet; (4) a second sheet is placed over the core; (5) a laminating apparatus then compresses and heats the first sheet, second sheet, and core to bond the outer layers of the core to the first and second sheets; (6) a sealing die is then utilized to bond the first sheet and second sheet around the periphery of the core to seal the bladder. As discussed above, therefore, the Goodwin involves a plurality of discrete steps and devices that form the sidewalls, bond the core to the sheets, and form the peripheral bond.

Lea involves a method of manufacturing a mattress that includes securing sheets of polymer material within a frame and placing a foam member between the sheets. A pair of hot press platens then contact the sheets to bond the sheets to the foam material. In addition, peripheral portions of the sheets are bonded with the platens. Referring to Figure 18, the sheets and foam material are shown between the platens. Although the platens contact the upper and

lower surfaces of the mattress and contact the sheets to form the bond around the periphery of the mattress, the platens are not depicted as contacting the sheets to form the sidewall. Air is then evacuated from the interior to compress the sheets against the foam material and further bond the sheets to opposite sides of the foam material. Finally, the mattress may be pressurized through a valve.

Each of the independent claims generally recite a method for forming a fluid-filled bladder that utilizes a single molding operation to (1) bond a pair of sheets of thermoplastic material to opposite sides of a core, (2) form a sidewall of the bladder from one of the sheets, and (3) compress the sheets together around a periphery of the core to form a peripheral bond. The mold that forms the bladder includes a first portion and a second portion. The first portion bonds one of the thermoplastic sheets to the core and forms the sidewall. The second portion bonds the other of the thermoplastic sheets to the core. With regard to formation of the sidewall, independent claim 1 recites that the first portion of the mold *contacts and shapes substantially all of a sidewall area of the first sheet* to form a sidewall of the bladder from the sidewall area. Independent claim 17 recites that the first portion of the mold *contacts and shapes substantially all of a second part of the first sheet* to form the second part of the first sheet into a sidewall of the bladder. Similarly, independent claim 31 recites that the first portion of the mold *contacts and shapes and shapes substantially all of a sidewall area of the first sheet* to form a sidewall of the bladder from the sidewall area. In contrast with Rudy, Goodwin, and Lea, therefore, the claims recite a single molding operation wherein the mold *contacts and shapes substantially all of a sidewall area* of one of the thermoplastic sheets to form the sidewall. More specifically, the claims recite that the mold contacts and shapes substantially all of a sidewall area, whereas Lea discloses that the platens contact only the portion of the sidewall that forms the bond between the sheets.

Based upon the above discussion, the Applicant respectfully submits that independent claims 1, 17, and 31 are allowable over the combination of Rudy, Goodwin, and Lea. Furthermore, claims 2-16, 18-30, and 32-35, which depend from the independent claims, are allowable for at least the same reasons.

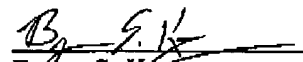
III. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, the Applicants respectfully submit that all claims are in a condition for allowance. The Applicants respectfully request, therefore, that the rejections be withdrawn and that this application now be allowed.

This Amendment is being timely filed by facsimile transmission on July 20, 2004. Should additional fees be deemed necessary for consideration of this Amendment, such fees or extension are hereby requested and the Commissioner is authorized to charge deposit account number 19-0733 for the payment of the requisite fee. If anything further is desirable to place the application in even better form for allowance, the Examiner is respectfully requested to telephone the undersigned representative at (503) 425-6800.

Respectfully submitted,

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